This Was Supposed

by Capt. Michael R. Brunnschweiler, USMC

The six-week spring WTI course was drawing to an end and, as one of the AV-8B students, I was looking forward to graduating on Monday. Saturday afternoon was devoted for planning and the last event, FinEx II, was scheduled for Sunday.

Since my Maverick shoot had been cancelled early in the syllabus, I was to fly it on Saturday afternoon while everyone else was planning. That suited me just fine. Why would I pass up the opportunity to shoot a Maverick, drop a couple of 1,000-pounders and then fire off 300 rounds of 25mm HEI? The flight lead for this sortie was the MAWTS-1 Ops O, and Dash 2 was another IP. The brief went smoothly as a well-oiled machine; everyone knew their jobs and capabilities. Lead and Dash 2 were carrying 10 Mk-82 500-pound HE bombs, each with an additional 300 rounds of 25mm HEI. The laser spot was going to be provided courtesy of a section of FA-18s. By all accounts, this was going to be a good deal!

After briefing all emergencies and contingencies, Dash 2 reminded me that, should I have to jettison my bombs, I needed to selectively jettison them to retain the LAU-117 launch rail of the Maverick. Little did I know I would do this in an hour.

The preflight, takeoff, and transit to the training area were uneventful, and we contacted the FA-18s for a laser spot. I was detached from my flight, proceeded inbound to the target area, and began my profile. The target lock and target verification went as planned, and I rifled just outside of three miles,

leveled my wings, and came off towards the south, watching for the impact.

On my way back to altitude to join my flight, I felt a slight thud with no secondaries. I double-checked my stores page to make sure I still had all my ordnance because it felt like an ordnance release. Since I was beginning my rendezvous with my division and had no other indications, I chalked it up to jet wash. Back in formation on the port side, I felt another thud. This time I double-checked all my pages and still saw nothing wrong. A few seconds later I got a caution light with audio tone. Hyd 1 failure! Checking the gauges, I saw Hyd 1 counting down through 1,500. I notified lead of my problem.

"Knock it off," called Dash 3.

I proceeded to evaluate the situation. Having had a Hyd 1 failure before, I started turning towards home, not being too worried. Then more caution lights illuminated that had no association with a Hyd 1 failure. Something made the hair stand up in the back of my neck. I turned right again to position for jettisoning the stores. I remembered to selectively jettison my Mk-83s in order to bring back my LAU-117, since I didn't want to do any paperwork later on.

Shortly after jettison, my situation got worse. I got an unsafe-gear indication and double-checked to make sure my gear was up. At the same time, I got a fire warning. I kept relaying what I saw to my wingmen. They confirmed that smoke was coming out of the bottom of the fuselage. I initiated emergency procedures for an in-flight fire as my stick started programming back and to the right. To counter it, I pushed the stick forward and to the left. The aircraft initially responded to my input. Seconds later, the aircraft started moving up and right again, even though my stick was fully deflected.

Realizing that things were about to get uglier, I relayed I was ejecting, stepping on a simultaneous call from my wingmen to eject. As I let go of both stick and throttle and reached for the ejection handle, I felt the aircraft squat and pitch up violently. Data showed that in one second, I had gone from 280 knots to 70 knots.

Waking up in my parachute, I found that procedures seemed to come automatically. Step 1. I'd make sure I had a good parachute. Steps 2 and 3 aren't recommended over land. Step 4. Options. Visor. What visor? Mask and gloves were off. Now, what just happened and

To Be a Good Deal!

photos by Capt. Michael R. Brunnschweiler, USMC

why is everything so blurry? I looked around and saw my wreckage off to the left. As I turned in my parachute, I saw the impact of bombs, dropped by my wingmen, in the vicinity of Blue Mountain.

Why is my vest all red? As I looked down, a steady stream of blood came from around my left eye. I touched the area, and it was all puffy and felt numb. Add to that, my right shoulder was hurting. Well, this was going to be an interesting landing.

After an eternity in the parachute (I ejected from 11,000 feet), the ride came to an end in the desert. On touchdown, I released my Koch fittings and turned off my ELT. While waiting for SAR to come pick me up, I had time to reflect on what just happened. I started feeling the pain from my injuries. Thirty minutes later, a Yuma SAR helo, came to pick me up and transported me to Yuma Regional.

I had a dislocated shoulder, a skull fracture, and a traumatic injury to the left eye, which was the big problem. It was cut open through the cornea, and I had lost my lens, iris and eye fluid. They extracted several visor pieces from the eye. I have since undergone four surgeries for the eye, and the end result is still up in the air (that's where I intend to be again – in the air).

Several good things came out of this mishap. One, we are not flying with the old harnesses anymore, which were prone to riser slap. Second, my belief in aircrew coordination training has been reaffirmed, especially for single-seat aircraft.

I never got a chance to thank the SAR crew that day, but I am eternally grateful for their quick response. I later found out that a KC-130 was diverted to the scene to provide fuel. The FA-18s that had given me a laser spot came back on scene, and my wingmen were able to remain throughout the recovery effort.

Capt. Brunnschweiler flew with VMA-231 and is now at HQMC.

Simulated Malfun

by AD1 Rene Watson

It was a typical training flight in a P-3C. We had set up simulated malfunctions in accordance with NATOPS and the Flight Instructor's Guide (FIG). Although I'm an experienced instructor flight engineer with plenty of hours on the circuit-breaker panel, this time I was overcome by mental fatigue but I didn't realize it.

During the four days prior to this training event, I had been studying extensively for an airframes-and-powerplants certification exam. I was getting only about five hours of sleep each night, which compounded my fatigue. Three days of testing, followed by the agonizing anticipation of the test results, only added to the mental overload.

The instructor pilot set up an engine fire as the simulated malfunction. While dealing with this problem, the instructor flight engineer has to pull all the circuit breakers for the fire-extinguishing system to keep from actually discharging the extinguishing agent into the engine. This setup was routine for all training flights, and I'd done it many times. The simulated malfunction was briefed before takeoff; however, I failed to pull the fire-extinguisher circuit breakers before the student